Shipping garbage north a trashy decision

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ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

No one can accuse Metro Toronto councillors of failing to do their civic duty in wrestling with the highly contentious issue of shipping the city's trash to an abandoned mine in Northern Ontario. There was no garbage-in, garbage-out casualness to their deliberations.

The Adams Mine debate should spur everyone in this province to think long and hard about what happens to those bags of garbage we set out on the curb on pickup day. It's probably fair to say that for most of us, it's currently a matter of out-of-sight, out-of- mind. But a contingent of concerned citizens from a community that for southern Ontarians is equally out of sight has shamed all of us into thinking that there must be a better solution to a sticky problem than dumping it on our neighbours. Toronto councillors have made a trashy decision in approving the transport of their trash to the Adams Mine. Voters will no doubt take note.

FULL TEXT

No one can accuse Metro Toronto councillors of failing to do their civic duty in wrestling with the highly contentious issue of shipping the city's trash to an abandoned mine in Northern Ontario. There was no garbage-in, garbage-out casualness to their deliberations.

In the end Wednesday, when they voted 33-23 to approve a $1- billion contract with Rail Cycle North to send garbage by rail to the Adams Mine near Kirkland Lake, there was a very strong feeling in Toronto that the very vocal opponents of the plan were right.

And they were.

Metro council had the chance to send a signal that it was going to handle its problem in its own neighbourhood instead of fobbing it off on residents in a community far away.

The proposal to ship tonnes and tonnes of Toronto's refuse north for the next 20 years, because the city's current dump site is slated for closure in 2002, met with initial support from those living in the Kirkland Lake region who were enticed by the prospect of $1 million a year in royalties and 80 full-time jobs. But on closer inspection, a groundswell of opposition grew out of fear that a garbage dump of this magnitude would contaminate their ground water. That message was heard loud and clear during four days of debate, which included the ejection of raucous protesters from the council chambers.

There may have been some sympathy with opponents who had travelled hundreds of kilometres to make their views known and got carried away in the heat of the moment. But there is no sympathy for political opportunists like Ontario NDP Leader Howard Hampton, a very conspicuous presence at the council sessions who tried to rack up cheap political points for his faltering party.

Hampton would have been better advised to try and persuade some of those leftist environmental ayatollahs who won't even consider the issue of incineration - even though modern incinerators bear little resemblance to those of old - to give it a rest.

In all likelihood, the residents of Toronto would entertain an honest debate about the pluses and minuses of burning their trash instead of foisting it on another community. That won't happen with the current crop of Toronto councillors, but the composition of that council may change significantly next month in reaction to Wednesday's vote on the Adams Mine.

Guelph residents should have been watching this debate with particular interest. Like a number of other communities in Ontario, we too will soon have to make a decision on what to do with our trash. No solution as radical as sending the garbage north by rail has yet been proposed, but the new council will have to deal seriously with the issue.

The Adams Mine debate should spur everyone in this province to think long and hard about what happens to those bags of garbage we set out on the curb on pickup day. It's probably fair to say that for most of us, it's currently a matter of out-of-sight, out-of- mind. But a contingent of concerned citizens from a community that for southern Ontarians is equally out of sight has shamed all of us into thinking that there must be a better solution to a sticky problem than dumping it on our neighbours. Toronto councillors have made a trashy decision in approving the transport of their trash to the Adams Mine. Voters will no doubt take note.

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